



UMB News

Cancer Center Maintains Highest Level of Distinction

July 23, 2021 | By [Karen Warmkessel](#)

The University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center (UMGCCC) has earned renewal of its National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation as a Comprehensive Cancer Center for another five years. The prestigious distinction recognizes the cancer center's high caliber of scientific leadership and robust programs in basic, clinical, and population science research, placing it in the top echelon of cancer centers nationwide.

The cancer center — a joint entity of the University of Maryland Medical Center (UMMC) and the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) — has been approved to receive a support grant of nearly \$13 million from NCI over the next five years, a 14 percent increase over the previous five-year grant award. UMGCCC was named an NCI-designated cancer center in 2008 and was elevated to Comprehensive Cancer Center status — NCI's highest designation — in 2016.



Kevin J. Cullen, MD

"The renewal of our designation is a tremendous achievement for our entire team — a process made even more challenging by the COVID-19 pandemic," said **Kevin J. Cullen, MD**, the Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Distinguished Professor in Oncology at UMSOM and the cancer center's director. "I am very proud of the hard work and dedication of our faculty and staff who embraced our renewal bid while continuing to provide lifesaving care to our patients under extraordinarily difficult circumstances."

Cullen noted the cancer center's ongoing growth and success. "Between our last submission and this renewal, direct cancer funding increased 69 percent, clinical trial enrollment increased 167 percent, and minority participation in clinical trials increased to 56 percent of total enrollment, which we believe is among the highest growth profile of all NCI cancer centers in the nation," he said.

As of December 2020, total cancer research funding for UMGCCC was \$100.9 million (\$78.9 million in direct funding), up from \$56.7 million (\$46.6 million in direct funding) when the cancer center first applied for Comprehensive Cancer Center status in 2016. With an NCI designation, cancer centers are better able to leverage additional resources for cancer research, education, and care.

There are approximately 1,500 cancer centers in the United States, and UMGCCC is one of only 51 NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Centers.

"This is an extraordinary accomplishment that demonstrates the level of cutting-edge discovery and innovations that the cancer center generates, which ultimately serves to benefit our patients. It reflects our faculty's commitment to engaging in lifesaving research and discovery-based medicine," said UMSOM Dean **E. Albert Reece, MD, PhD, MBA**, vice president for medical affairs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore and the

John Z. and Akiko K. Bowers Distinguished Professor. "I congratulate Dr. Cullen and his team for this remarkable achievement which will further enhance our ability to make major breakthroughs in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer."

Bert W. O'Malley, MD, UMMC's president and chief executive officer who also is a head and neck surgeon at UMGCCC and professor of otorhinolaryngology-head and neck surgery at UMSOM, added, "Everyone who works in the Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center shares in this success, as do our critical supporters at the University of Maryland, Baltimore; the University of Maryland School of Medicine; the University of Maryland Medical System [UMMS]; and the state of Maryland."

The renewal of the cancer center's Comprehensive Cancer Center designation is the culmination of a more than 18-month effort. UMGCCC submitted a 1,624-page application to NCI at the end of last year and for the first time underwent a rigorous virtual review process in February, rather than an in-person site visit by peer reviewers. That was followed by two additional levels of committee review at NCI.

"In the application and at the site visit, we presented a number of examples of how UMGCCC science has been translated to clinical practice, including a number of first-in-human clinical trials as well as a successful, NCI-funded COVID-19 treatment trial of a compound invented by UMGCCC investigators," Cullen said. "With this renewal completed, we now look forward to accelerating our mission of inquiry and service over the next five years. I am enormously proud of how far we have come as a center since our original NCI designation in 2008. I am also extremely optimistic about our future."

Nearly 300 physicians and scientists work together at the cancer center. UMGCCC has comprehensive research programs in experimental therapeutics, hormone-related cancers, molecular and structural biology, population science, and tumor immunology and immunotherapy.

UMGCCC has pioneered advances in cancer treatment, including the development of aromatase inhibitors to treat breast cancer by the late **Angela Brodie, PhD**; the invention of the GammaPod, a new radiation treatment option for early-stage breast cancer that can reduce the number of treatments and spare healthy tissue from radiation; and the development of promising new drug compounds and immunotherapies, such as a next-generation chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy.

UMGCCC was the first cancer center in the Baltimore-Washington area to offer CAR-T cell therapy for B cell lymphomas. A number of clinical trials with this innovative therapy are underway for lymphoma and leukemia.

The cancer center also is at the heart of the University of Maryland Cancer Network, which includes cancer centers at several community hospitals within UMMS — the University of Maryland St. Joseph Medical Center, the University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Medical Center, the University of Maryland Baltimore Washington Medical Center, and University of Maryland Shore Regional Health.

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

The University of Maryland, Baltimore is the founding campus of the University System of Maryland.
620 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201 | 410-706-3100
© 2021 University of Maryland, Baltimore. All rights reserved.